

MEDICAL OFFICER OF HEALTH'S REPORT

FOR THE YEAR 1939.

The following report of the Medical Officer of Health for the year 1939 is necessarily much curtailed following the receipt of Circular 2067 from the Ministry of Health which asks that it be confined to urgent and essential matters which have affected the public health during the year. The records are being preserved and after the termination of the war a fuller report will be given.

Section C. Sanitary circumstances of the area.

Water. No new sources of supply have been utilised during the year and water analyses have been generally good. Temporary chlorination plants have been installed at both the High and Low Level Purification Works. Work was begun on the installation of a permanent plant at the Lower Works.

Drainage and Sewerage. Work was begun during the year on the construction of storm water overflows and outfall sewers from the High Level System in Union Street and in the grounds of the Boys' Senior School at Withycombe. The former section is now complete and in operation, and work has progressed favourably on the latter.

Section E. Inspection and supervision of Food.

Chemical and Bacteriological examination of Food. During the month of July, there was a small outbreak of nausea and vomiting among the school children at two of the local schools. Investigation showed that the only food common to both was the milk supply. The herd concerned was inspected the next morning in conjunction with the local representative of the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries and following on the exclusion of a cow suffering from mastitis and another that had recently calved no further cases occurred.

Section F. Prevalence of, and control over, infectious and other Diseases.

Owing to mixing of immunities, which was the natural result of evacuation it was feared that an outbreak of diphtheria might ensue, following on the introduction of carriers into a susceptible community. The Council at their meeting in September had consented to the diphtheria immunisation scheme and plans were set on foot to carry it into effect. Newspaper articles were written, lectures given to Mother's Unions, Women's Institutes etc., posters displayed and propaganda leaflets were distributed to all the children in the town. With the efficient help of the local doctors and our team of clinic workers almost the whole of the child population of the town was immunised with A.P.T. by the two injection method at the eight centres which were set up for the purpose. In addition the greater majority of the evacuated

children were immunised. The campaign had an unprecedented success and it is felt that in large measure the success of the scheme was due to the splendid help rendered by the heads of the local schools. They lent the whole weight of their considerable influence to advise the parents and children to accept the benefits of immunisation and put in a lot of hard work in arranging for the consent forms and the accurate completion of the necessary record cards. Our thanks must also be rendered to the Devon County Council for allowing us the use of the schools as centres for the immunisation.

In all some 2879 children were immunised at a cost of 1/1.88d. per child, 669 being in the 1-5 age group and 2210 over the age of 5.

Although A.P.T. was used throughout reactions were few and not very severe, freshly prepared material was always used and particular care was taken to ensure that a separate sterilised needle was employed for each child. Sharp needles of fine calibre were used throughout.

To achieve continuity, all children born after the 1st October, 1938, may now go to their own doctors and be immunised against diphtheria. The Council provide the necessary material and pay a fee of 5/- for each completed case.

The London County Council made provision for the supply of measles serum to any practitioner in the town and all were advised of the facility by circular. In addition measles serum is now available at the County Laboratory for children under 5 years of age. A quantity of anti-Scarlet Fever Serum is now kept at the Public Health Dept., for any cases of Scarlet Fever nursed at home and a quantity of Diphtheria anti-toxin is also available.

The cases of diphtheria during the year were largely sporadic in character, but three cases occurred in one house. Several carriers were also detected among evacuated children and we were fortunate in finding the source of infection before it became more widespread. Following on diphtheria immunisation no new case of diphtheria has occurred. Scarlet Fever was more prevalent than usual in the last three months of the year. No common source of infection except in family cases could be detected. Searches were made for possible undetected cases at the schools, without success.

With regard to non-notifiable diseases the schools are our only source of information. During the year 6 cases of German Measles, 6 cases of Chickenpox and one case of Mumps were notified.

MATTERS ARISING FROM THE WAR.

One of the outstanding events of the war as it affected Exmouth during 1939 was the putting into operation of the evacuation scheme on September 1st.

The children arrived in the afternoon and with the voluntary help of some of the local doctors were given a cursory medical examination. The V.A.D. gave treatment on the spot to some of the children who needed it and through the courtesy of some of the local residents, who had offered their homes for the nursing of sick children it was possible for such children to be taken to these homes, where they received the necessary medical attention. A more complete examination of the children was undertaken a few days later and a search made for rashes, scabies etc. At this examination several diphtheria carriers were detected and segregated.

The school clinic, reinforced with the help of voluntary workers functioned daily for over two months and three days per week thereafter. Over 2,000 treatments were given up to the end of the year.

A head cleansing centre was set up and run by a band of voluntary workers under the direction of an experienced nurse and in a few months over 200 children had their heads cleansed.

Arrangements were also made with the consent of the Ministry of Health for the nursing of sick children at the local convalescent homes and a special hostel for the treatment of scabies was contemplated. Cases of enuresis who could not be nursed at home were taken into a small hostel which two local ladies ran on a voluntary basis.

Much work was also undertaken by the department in the inspection of billets for the military and a constant liaison was maintained with the necessary exchange of information on public health matters.

At the conclusion of this report I should like to record my thanks to my predecessor, Dr U.M.Hopkins for his help in making matters smooth when I took over my new duties. My thanks must also be recorded to Mr Long, the Sanitary Inspector, for the valuable assistance he has rendered me at all times, and for his help in the compilation of this report.

It is also a pleasure to record the ready co-operation at all times to this department by the other officers of the Council.

I am, Madam and Gentlemen,
Your obedient Servant,

W.J.DOYLE.

Medical Officer of Health.

